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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Charles Warren Greene

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CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Columbus, CHRISTOPHER (a Latinised form of the Italian *Cristoforo Colombo;* the Spanish form, *Cristóbal Colon,* corresponds to another Latinisation into *Colonus*), a great navigator, and the discoverer of the New World, was born at or near Genoa, probably in 1435 or 1436, or, as some writers have stated, in 1446. His father, Dominico Colombo, seems to have been a wool-comber, and it would appear that in early youth his son Christopher worked at the same trade; but he spent some time, probably not much, at the university of Pavia. When fourteen years old he went to sea. The mariners of those days were fighting men, and we find notices of the young Columbus in an expedition against Naples while in the service of the good King René, Count of Provence, who, on one occasion, sent the young man to Tunis, to cut out a captured galley. It is not a little remarkable that on this occasion his men, like so many of his later crews, refused to obey his orders; and he was obliged, as more than once in later years, to deceive them as to his real course. The accounts of his early voyages are obscure and of doubtful accuracy. About 1470 he was wrecked in a sea-fight off Cape St. Vincent, and reached the shores of Portugal on a plank. In Lisbon he married the

daughter of one Perestrello, or Pellestrello, an Italian navigator, who had governed Porto Santo, off Madeira, for the Portuguese king. On this island Columbus resided for some time, making charts for the support of his family, and studying the maps and papers left by his father-in-law.

As early as 1474 he had conceived the design of reaching India by sailing westward. In 1477, he tells us, he 'sailed 100 leagues beyond Thule,' probably to or beyond Iceland, where he may have got some vague hint of the old Norse adventures on the American coast. Columbus soon after this began to seek a patron for his intended expedition. He applied to the senate of Genoa; once or more to King John II. of Portugal; later by letters to Henry VII. of England; then to the rich and powerful dukes of Medina Sidonia and Medina Celi, in Spain, of whom the last named at length referred him to Isabella the Catholic, queen of Castile. His application to the queen was submitted to a body of jurors, most of them ecclesiastics, who reported adversely to the project of the Genoese mariner. Finally, through the intervention of Juan Perez de Marchena, a monk who had been the queen's confessor, he was brought in contact with their Catholic majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella. His plans and demands were once more rejected, but afterwards reconsidered; and finally, after seven years of alternate encouragement and repulse, his proposals were accepted by the monarchs, in the camp of Santa Fé, April 17, 1492. On Friday, August 3, 1492, Columbus, now an admiral, set sail from the bar of Saltes, an island near Palos, in command of the small ship *Santa Maria*, with 50 men, and attended

by two little caravels, the *Pinta* and the *Niña*, the whole squadron comprising only 120 adventurers. He first made the Canary Islands, whence, on the 6th of September, he set sail westward. On the 13th a variation of the magnetic needle was observed, a circumstance which struck terror into the hearts of his followers. From this and various other causes he found it hard to keep up the courage and patience of his crews. On Friday, October 12, land was descried. There is no doubt that this first landfall, named San Salvador by Columbus, was one of the Bahama Islands; and the more general recent opinion would appear to be that it was what is now called Watling's Island; but this is not by any means certain. He then visited Cuba and Hayti, which he named Hispaniola or Little Spain, and where he planted a small colony of Spaniards. He set sail on his return with his two caravels (for his flagship had been wrecked), and after an exceedingly tempestuous voyage, the *Niña* alone cast anchor in the Tagus. He re-entered the port of Palos, March 15, 1493. On the very same day the *Pinta* also, which had parted company from him more than a month before, entered the same port, having been driven out of her course to Bayonne. The voyagers brought back with them some gold, various plants, birds, and land animals, and six natives of the West Indies. Columbus was received with the highest honours by the court, then at Barcelona, and was hailed as admiral of the sea and a grandee of Spain.

He sailed on his second voyage on the 25th of September, with three carracks and seventeen small caravels, and on the 3d of November sighted the island

of Dominica in the West Indies. His remaining career presents one long series of failures, vexations, and miseries. After a succession of wretched quarrels with his associates, and a long and desperate illness in Hispaniola, he returned to Spain much dejected in 1496. His third voyage, begun in 1498, resulted in the discovery of the South American mainland. In 1499 Columbus and his brother were sent home in irons by a newly-appointed royal governor; but the king and queen repudiated this action, and restored Columbus to favour. His last great voyage (1502–4), along the south side of the Gulf of Mexico, was accomplished in the midst of great hardships and in many distresses of body and mind. Spanish jealousy of the foreigner and of his well-earned honours worked against him on sea no less than at court. Columbus died at Valladolid, in Spain, May 20, 1506. He was buried at Valladolid; but in 1513 his remains were translated to Seville, whence in 1536, with those of his son Diego, they were removed to Santo Domingo, in Hispaniola. In 1796 they were, it is stated, transferred to the cathedral at Havana; but there is some reason to believe that by mistake it was the bones of Diego Colon, and not those of his father, which were removed on the last-named occasion. At present both Havana and Santo Domingo claim his ashes as their treasure.

A man of ardent impulses and strongly poetical imagination, Columbus was hardly the stuff that leaders are made of; consequently he failed to control the turbulent and adventurous spirits among his followers. Although an honestly and earnestly religious

and truly conscientious man, he was not seldom guilty of acts which subsequently brought him many compunctions of conscience. Irritable and impetuous, he was, nevertheless, magnanimous and benevolent. His conduct in the capture and sale of slaves, though justified by the jurists and divines of the time, was indignantly condemned by the queen, and can only be explained by the desire of Columbus and the crown to obtain some revenue from his new discoveries, and by the expectation that while detained in slavery the natives might become christianised.

His brother BARTHOLOMEW, who died in Cuba in 1514, was a man of high character and excellent abilities, and assisted Columbus effectively in his labours. —Another brother, GIACOMO (called in Spain DIEGO), who also assisted him in his West Indian government, was a man of gentle and pacific disposition, but was no match for the turbulent adventurers he attempted to control.—Christopher's eldest son, Diego (about 1480–1526), was the heir to his honours, merits, and misfortunes. The great discoverer left also a natural son, Don Fernando (1488–1539), who wrote an important Life of his father, preserved only in an Italian translation (Venice, 1571). In 1578 the last legitimate descendant of Columbus in the male line died.

Among the biographies of Columbus the best in English are those of Irving (1831), St John (1850), Crompton (1859), and Helps (1868). See also *The Narrative and Critical History of America*, edited by Winsor, vol. ii.; Harrisse, *Colomb* (Paris, 1884); and Varaldo, *L'Origine di Cristoforo Colombo* (1887).

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